

Nick
Shumlanski

It has been almost a year since the day that seemingly made our world stand still. My parents received a frantic phone call shortly after the Humboldt Broncos bus drove past our family home from my little brother Nick, who was calling from the Armley Corner after his team bus collided with a semi-truck. My parents rushed to the scene as fast as possible and witnessed the aftermath of a terrible accident, which is something no person should have to see. My parents, Myles and Vivian, were one of the first set of parents on scene and did what they could to help those who they could see as the survivors. Both my parents and Nick were witness to sights that no person should have to see in their lifetime.

Although Nick came out of the accident with only a mastoid fracture, which is a fracture of the temporal bone behind his ear, and a L4 fracture, he has suffered significantly with his mental health, and so has the rest of the family. Since the accident we have been living our lives in constant fear and worry about what is going to happen next. Is Nick okay today? Are mom and dad okay today? Is Ty okay today? Am I okay today? Is that vehicle that is approaching the highway going to stop before it hits the intersection? We have also all been living with some sort of anger in our day. Nick was almost taken from us- he almost lost his life and we almost lost an important piece of our family's puzzle. Anxiety has struck us all in different ways since April 6th.

Nick began counseling shortly after his release from the hospital, and was soon sent to a PTSD therapist to help with his night terrors and other difficulties that arose during thoughts and discussions about the accident. Nick will have anxiety attacks at any point throughout his day, whether it be at home, school, or driving on the highway. Throughout the summer, we made several trips to see Nicholas in Saskatoon because his day was proving to be too difficult for him, or he didn't want to be alone while his girlfriend was busy at work. It has been almost one year since the accident, and he is still unable to get onto a charter bus with his teammates in

PEI and go to the away games. He either drives himself to the games, or joins someone from the coaching staff. Nick often questions why this happened: "why did this have to happen? Why us?". Whenever anything about the Humboldt Broncos is on the news or shared on social media, which is often, Nick is angry, because this should not have happened.

My mom hasn't been able to work since May, since driving past the accident was her only way to get to work each day. She breaks down several times a day, everyday while thinking of Nick and what happened that night. One Friday evening as a Charlie's Charters bus drove past the house at a time similar to that of the Bronco bus driving past the house in April, mom broke down in debilitating tears because all she could picture was the accident. I drive past the site twice a day while going to and from work. I start having anxiety attacks on the highway that consist of short breath and blinding tears while I am driving on the highway. I am currently seeking employment elsewhere so I can avoid driving past the corner everyday. I am doing my best to get as far away from the site of the accident everyday, by leaving a job and a school that I love. My father took weeks off of work to help support my brother and the rest of the family as we healed and coped with the accident. To this day, certain images will upset him and make him angry about the accident. My older brother, Tyrell, has had difficulty sleeping and has become more nervous while driving because he too worries that something is going to go wrong. We should not have to live our lives full of worry, anxiety, or fear of the possibility of this accident happening again. We should not have to live our lives knowing that we almost lost someone so very close to us. We should not have to live our lives avoiding a certain stretch of highway because we can no longer handle being so close to it.

Our family home is one-quarter mile away from the scene of the accident. This is something that only our family is experiencing. While other families are going through their own difficult experiences with the accident, we are the only ones who have to live this close to the

accident. It is hard to avoid the stretch of highway that your family home resides on, the stretch of highway that you need to take to get your job, the stretch of highway where you almost lost a little brother, a son, an uncle, a cousin, a boyfriend. We relive the phone calls, the tears, the screams, every time we drive past that corner. This is our life now, and this should not be our lives. Maybe one day driving to my parents house, or driving to work will be easy, but I know that today is not that day, nor will it be tomorrow or the day after that.